

Speech by Arts and Culture Deputy Minister Obed Bapela, debate in parliament during youth month

5 June 2013

Hon. Members of Parliament

Members of the media,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The 37th commemoration of the youth month is a fresh reminder of the sacrifices made by the youth of 1976. They laid down their lives, so that you and I can enjoy the freedom we enjoy today. As we appreciate their efforts, we resolve to that through working with the young generation of today. We do this, because we understand that it is only through involving young people as instruments of change and development that we can sustain the gains reaped by our democracy.

Available estimates show that we have many young people across the globe compared to children and adults. In the world the youth (15-25 years) constitute 1.1 billion or 18% of the global population. Youth and children together (0-24 years) constitute 40% of the world population. In most African countries, including Kenya, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Zambia, children and youth constitute above or over 60% of the total population, with the young people constituting about a third (30%). In South Africa, children and youth constitute 70% of the population whilst youth aged 14-35 constitute 41.2% of the population. In the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) region, those below the age of 35 constitute 76% of the population.

The proportion of this youth population is projected to peak at 35.6% of the total population by 2032. Again, the 2011 United Nations Economic Commission for Africa report confirmed that the youth population in Africa will generally remain high by 2050. This trend of an increasing youthful population happen despite sub-regional variations as well the declining number of births.

The demographics which I just highlighted clearly indicate that the youth population would continue to grow in absolute numbers. It is therefore undisputed that, young people deserve a bigger share of development investments. Therefore, addressing youth issues should remain salient for the global community, African governments, the SADC region, and the South African community. This is essential considering the fact that the majority of these youth account for the large share of the working population, and the hurdles they experience need to be attended to during their youth period before they enter adulthood.

The increased youth population demand that all of us must seize an opportunity to invest fully in this future generation in order to fully reap the benefits of development. On the other hand, lack of investment will expose us to a sorry state where development gains are reversed. Planning and the right investments in youth will empower them to make choices that are good for themselves, their communities and also for the world.

In response to the bulging youth population, there have been activities that are geared towards addressing the continuous challenges they experience, such as poverty, poor access to education, unemployment, increased exposure to risky lifestyles and behaviours, violence and conflict etc. We have the opportunity to fully develop the potential of youth so that they can contribute effectively to the world's development agenda. This conviction can only happen if there is commitment to prioritise youth development and to empower and anchor the youth to become strong and accountable leaders as well as an asset for development in the global arena.

I agree with Kofi Anan when he says: "Young people should be in the forefront of global change and innovation. Empowered, they can be agents of development and peace. If however they are left on society's margins, all of us will be impoverished. Let us ensure that all young people have every opportunity to participate fully in the lives of the societies".

As we celebrate the youth month under the government's chosen theme of: "Working Together for Youth Development and a Drug Free South Africa." We are mindful that if we do not address this problem, our youth will not be able to enjoy the fruits of freedom which the past generation fought very hard for. Equally, we join the Parliament in celebrating this Youth month under the theme: "Youth at the centre of Economic opportunities".

In preparing for this demographic window, the President will be championing implementation of the country's youth development agenda in order to direct the efforts of various stakeholders. In this regard, the President has mandated a Presidential Youth working Group be established to afford him an opportunity to interact with the relevant stakeholders in the youth development space.

As a platform for government, civil society, private sectors and Institution of higher learning, the Presidential Youth Working Group will be guided by the identified BIG FIVE priorities, namely:

1. The first priority is Youth Economic Participation – As you may all know, about 25.2% of South Africans are unemployed. This is a narrow definition of unemployment as used by

Statistics South Africa in calculating quarterly unemployment rates. Out of these unemployed South Africans, the percentage contribution of unemployed people who are aged 15 to 35 (youth in other words) is about 72%. We also know that about 2.2 million people out of the labour force are discouraged from looking for a job. By prioritising youth economic participation we will be emphasising job creation with a particular focus on entrepreneurship.

The Presidential Youth working Group place emphasis on job creation, particularly entrepreneurship. Specifically, the implementation of the recently signed Youth Employment Accord will be the centre of ensuring youth economic participation. The Youth Accord serves as a viable and meaningful approach to addressing the challenge of youth unemployment. This process which is being led by the Minister of Economic Development, Honourable Minister Ebrahim Patel, has seen all social partners signing the Youth Accord on 18 April 2013. The accord emphasizes the following 6 commitments:

- a) Improving the skills based
- b) Giving young people work exposure
- c) Involving young people in National Youth Service
- d) Intensifying public employment programmes
- e) Supporting youth entrepreneurship and youth cooperatives
- f) Promoting Private sector measures

Additionally, Government is already committing towards addressing these priorities. For example, the Department of Economic Development (EDD) made a financial commitment to support the growth of young entrepreneurs, totalling R3 billion over the next five years through the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) and Small Enterprise Finance Agency (SEFA). This will go a long way in facilitating the growth and development of young entrepreneurs in South Africa. The NYDA will serve as a conveyor belt for the screening and recommendation of young entrepreneurs to access the loan finance offered by the IDC and SEFA.

2. The second priority is Education and Skills Development – The situation South Africa faces is somewhat complicated than just fixing the education problems and hope for a change. There are large scores of youth who possess no skills and they also exited the education system prematurely. In long term, fixing education yes will solve many of South Africa's woes but in the interim, skilling the many out of school youth who are perhaps over the age of schooling might be the best strategy. This priority recognises the significance of education and intensifies skills development for the youth, especially for those who have dropped out of school and are unemployed.

About 60% of unemployed youth aged below 35 years have never worked and this means that they lost on the opportunity to develop skills and to gain work experience. It may also be of no value to pursue them to obtain matric, but rather help them obtain skills that will assist them to be employed and lead sustainable livelihoods. It is clear that the lack of skills contribute to unemployment. While education focuses on in school youth, it is clear that if we are to make meaningful impact to unemployed out of school youth, we need to intensify skills with biasness towards technical and vocational skills training in both short and long term.

3. The third priority is Professionalisation of Youth Work – focuses on recognition of youth work as a profession and building capacity through creating a body of knowledge, establishing professional association, and strengthening youth development machinery such as youth directorates and SAYC.

Lack of professionalisation compromises service delivery, lead exploitation of youth workers, frustrates those already qualified, contributes to high unemployment rate, lead to high turn-over, expose young people to malpractices, and has also resulted in decreased demand for youth work qualifications as well as eventual suspension or abolishment of youth work programme by some tertiary institutions where training already exist.

4. The fourth priority is Substance Abuse and Violence Prevention – A number of case studies suggest that one in two school children admit to experimenting with drugs. Researchers predicted that the pandemic could pose a bigger threat compared to HIV and AIDS if it is not addressed, because it carries significant health risks, but it is also associated with serious, and often devastating, social problems, like: crime and violence, accidents and injury, risky sexual behaviour, scholastic problems, mental and physical health problems.

Therefore by prioritising actions aimed at combatting substance abuse as well as prevention of violence against women and children, we will also be dealing with implications of these such as crime, gangsterism, family dysfunction and other forms of social problems. It is on this basis that the PYWG seeks to join hands with other stakeholders in fighting the scourge of this problem. This will be a means towards preservation of our families and communities and an effort to create sober youth who are able to participate actively in development processes.

5. The fifth last priority is National Youth Service – by prioritising the National Youth Service, we will be encouraging the youth to be skilled and to volunteer their services to their communities so that they contribute to social cohesion and nation building.

The above priorities will be presented to the President for him to lead in championing. The different role players will be encouraged to plan jointly and pool resources in addressing the identified priorities. Most importantly is the need for each of the role player to commit in implementation so that many young people can be reached and impact can be made.

I thank you

Speeches:

Minister's speeches

Year:

2013

Speech date::

Wednesday, June 5, 2013